

If only we had brain-to-brain connections

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IN THIS ARTICLE YOU'LL FIND OUT:

- Why communication is not as easy as we think
- Is written communication better than spoken?
- How to avoid errors in communication



Humans have mastered many challenges since the species of Homo sapiens began to wander the Earth some 300,000 years ago. We are able to climb the highest mountains of our planet, dive almost 11 km (6.8 miles) deep into the Mariana Trench, and even send robots to Mars. Yet, the biggest challenge for us may actually be a lot more down-to-earth: human communication.



Misunderstandings often stand in our way to success and happiness, adding an unexpected level of complexity to our everyday life. We see them happening between project managers and developers, between clients and agencies, but also among close team members.

WHY DO WE STRUGGLE SO MUCH WITH COMMUNICATION?

It used to be a lot simpler. Back in the days, some 200,000 years ago, our ancestors were not able to speak. That doesn't mean that they were not able to communicate. They used gestures, primitive sounds, and screams to connect with their peers. That was enough to show how they felt, make other people aware of immediate dangers, point out the juiciest berries... or to advise someone to disappear from their sight. According to communication psychologists, about 80% of our communication is non-verbal and mostly unconscious.¹

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

As you can imagine, nonverbal communication is not sufficient enough to discuss whether indentation with spaces or tabs is better. That's where verbal communication comes into play. For us, human beings, verbal communication is an efficient way to articulate our thoughts in a complex world. Our languages are also referred to as digital communication.²

It means that we use abstract words as references for physical objects – e.g. the word "cat" for a feline creature

– as well as for concepts that are apart from a specific object e.g. the injustice we feel when one cat eats the food of its siblings.

A cat can be represented by a drawing, a sculpture or by mimicking the cat's sounds – that's called analog communication. However, trying to express our sense of justice with analog communication is more difficult, if not impossible. So digital communication is a good choice to express abstract qualities and characteristics.

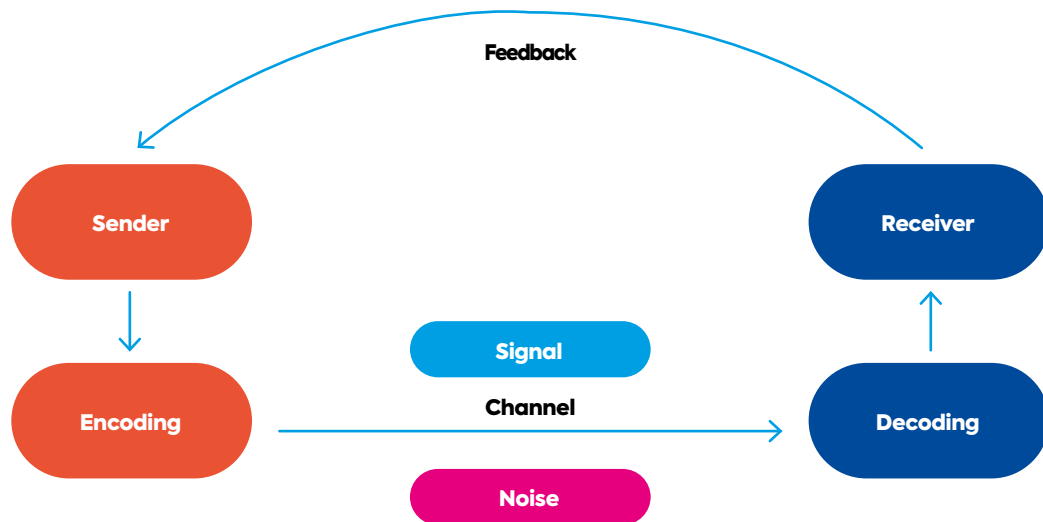
PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATING VIA COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The problem with digital communication is that it's up to our brain's interpretation to make sense out of the audio signals our ears pick up. When the sender uses abbreviations without introducing those first, or technical terms without explaining them, it gets harder for us to decode the message.

The Shannon-Weaver³ model of communication illustrates the basic process of all human communication. The sender encodes a message as a signal, which gets to the receiver through a channel. The receiver decodes the signal to understand the message (Pic. 1).

Communication can fail in several parts of this model: the sender makes a mistake during encoding the message, e.g. using the wrong word; there could be too much noise

Pic. 1 The Shannon-Weaver model of communication



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